

Assembly Bill 664

COVID-19: First Responders

Assemblymembers Cooper, Gonzalez and Bonta

SUMMARY

Due to the unique dangers faced by first responders, certain types of injuries are deemed presumptively work related. During the COVID-19 pandemic, first responders and health care professionals are required by law to provide vital public safety services. This puts them at a higher risk of exposure and infection. AB 664 will classify COVID-19, and other communicable diseases, as presumptive work-related injuries for Nurses, Firefighters and Peace Officers.

BACKGROUND

Pandemics such as the flu pandemics of 1918, 1957, 1968 have killed or infected hundreds of thousands of Californians. Epidemics and localized communicable diseases are even more common.

When these diseases emerge, first responders and health care workers are at the forefront continuing to provide public health and safety services placing themselves at a higher risk for infection. Their professions are unique in that they have an obligation by statute and oath to report to duty. Furthermore, these public servants place themselves at a higher risk when they are required to go directly towards the threat.

Peace officers and firefighters continue to respond to calls for service placing them into close contact with quarantined individuals and those who refuse to adhere to government-imposed guidelines. Nurses and other health care workers are inundated with infected patients and are charged with providing critical medical care.

During these outbreaks, staffing levels are strained, internal and external, and mutual aid staffing models are common directly placing all first responders in the path of danger.

These professionals are highly trained and cannot be easily replaced resulting in public safety agencies and health care departments to require all their employees to front line duties.

Through mid-April California's first responders have been infected with COVID-19 or quarantined in staggering numbers. The California Nurses Association (CNA) reports that approximately 3,584 health care workers have tested positive for COVID-19. In the same time-frame, the California Professional Firefighters (CPF) report that approximately 300 firefighters have been quarantined and 119 firefighters have tested positive for COVID-19. In Los Angeles alone, there have been a minimum of 100 peace officers testing positive with over 450 peace officers on quarantine. Sadly COVID-19 has claimed the lives of 4 nurses and 3 peace officers in California. These numbers represent only a fraction of the infected first responders because they only capture local agencies reporting to CNA, CPF, ALADS and LAPPL.

To protect first responders on the front-lines of the COVID-19 pandemic response AB 664 provides:

1. An occupational presumption for injuries sustained from COVID-19, and other communicable diseases, for peace officers, firefighters, and health care workers
2. The presumptive injury status applies ONLY if there is a declared state of emergency by state or local governments
3. Reasonable reimbursements for out of pocket expenses for personal protective equipment and other costs that provides for protection to self and the public
4. Property right protections (leave balances) for these workers when they are ordered home, without confirmed testing, by their employer

SUPPORT

Association for Los Angeles Deputy Sheriffs
(ALADS)
California Nurses Association
California Professional Firefighters
California Association of Highway Patrolmen
Cal Fire Firefighters
Los Angeles Police Protective League
(LAPPL)
Peace Officers Research Association of
California (PORAC)
Riverside Sheriff's Association
San Francisco Deputy Sheriff's Association

STATUS

Amended, April 17, 2020
Senate Committee on Labor, Public
Employment and Retirement

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